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UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

STUDIES IN THE TRADE RELATIONS
OF THE BRITISH WEST INDIES
AND NORTH AMERICA,
1763-1773; 1783-1793

BY
HERBERT C. BELL

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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British Commercial Policy in the West Indies, 1783-93

IN March 1775 Burke, speaking on conciliation with America, pointed out that the three branches of trade carried on by Great Britain with the continental colonies, with the West Indies, and with Africa respectively were 'so interwoven that the attempt to separate them would tear to pieces the contexture of the whole and, if not entirely destroy, would much depreciate the value of all the parts'. Eight years later thirteen of the continental colonies were placed, by the acknowledgement of American independence, outside the compact commercial system enclosed and guarded by the navigation acts. Now, it has of late been fully understood that the principles of British commercial policy were not altered by the events of the American Revolution. How then did the British government contrive to preserve its old monopolist system, and yet to avoid the injuries to the West Indian trade which Burke had anticipated?

In order to understand the points at issue, we must bear in mind certain of the conditions under which intercolonial trade in America was carried on previously to the revolutionary war. In particular we must remember that the thirteen colonies and the West Indies were not alone interested in the trade. Canada, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland gladly exchanged fish and their scanty surplus stock of lumber and flour for the produce of the islands, although their geographical position placed them at a serious disadvantage as compared with their sister colonies to the South.¹ British shipowners engrossed what they could of the carrying trade between the continent and the West Indies, but found themselves heavily handicapped by the advantages which the Americans enjoyed through their proximity to the islands, the low cost of their ships, and the ability of these tiny

¹ It is difficult to estimate the volume of this trade, since most of it was conducted indirectly through the New England merchants. See the evidence of Inspector-General Irving before the Committee of Trade, 30 March 1784: Public Record Office, Board of Trade, Minutes of the Committee of Trade, 3, fo. 124. In 1772 out of 1208 vessels arriving in the West Indies from North America only 13 were from these colonies: *ibid.* fo. 11.

vessels to enter any and all ports.² British and Irish fishermen competed in the sugar islands against New England rivals;³ while Irish farmers, although denied the privilege of direct trade with the colonies until 1778, easily outdistanced the farmers of Virginia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania in supplying beef and pork to West Indian markets.⁴ In the British Islands, then, were many persons who would gain from the interruption of the chief branch of intercolonial trade. But the West Indians were well supplied with friends in England who were prepared to support their interests. Great Britain had sixty million pounds invested in the islands;⁵ three-quarters of a million of its revenue was derived from West Indian produce;⁶ British goods representing a much larger sum and slaves to the value of another half-million were disposed of by West Indian merchants;⁷ and,

² Colonial-built vessels were generally inferior to British-built, but were much cheaper: see the evidence of James Anderson, agent at Boston for a Glasgow firm, before the Committee of Trade (Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 7, fo. 486). They constituted three-quarters of all the vessels engaged in trade between the North American continent and the islands: Brit. Mus., Add. MS. 12404. The British merchants who entered the trade sent out large ships which usually followed a 'three-cornered' route from Great Britain to North America, thence to the sugar islands, and thence again to Great Britain. But these vessels could make only one voyage a year, could trade only at large American ports where their cargoes were collected, were relatively expensive to work, and were apt to be too late in reaching the islands: Correspondence of John Reynell among the uncatalogued family papers of Joseph H. Coates, Esq., of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The American merchants carried on the bulk of their trade in little coasting vessels of 40 to 50 tons, which skirted the shores of the continent and cruised at will through the islands, loading and discharging cargo wherever advantage offered, and making two or three trips a year: Pemberton and Clifford papers in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia. Statistics will be found in the Minutes of the Committee of Trade, March to May 1784, Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 3.

³ Add. MS. 12404, fo. 54.

⁴ Evidence presented by Irving before the Committee of Trade, 30 March 1784: Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 3, fo. 124. Irish meat, though somewhat more expensive, was superior in quality and could be kept longer. Direct trade was legalized by 18 Geo. III, c. 55, and 20 Geo. III, c. 10. A certain amount appears, however, to have been carried on previously to the passage of these acts: *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, Seventh Series, ix. 299, 304, 306, 307.

⁵ Add. MS. 12413, fo. 20. State of the West Indies laid before parliament, March 1775. In the petition of the West India planters of February 1775 the amount is given as thirty millions (*Parliamentary History*, xviii. 219), but it may easily be demonstrated that the larger sum is approximately accurate. See *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, viii. 525.

⁶ Speech of Glover in the house of commons, March 1775: *Parl. Hist.* xviii. 461. This estimate is apparently moderate. The duty on 16,000,000 cwt. of sugar (Public Record Office, Treasury Revenue Accounts, Misc. Engl., 65) at 6s. 3½d. a hundredweight would amount to more than £500,000. The duties and excise on 2,250,000 gallons of rum (Treasury Revenue Accounts, Misc. Engl. 65) at 5s. 0½d. a gallon would amount to £560,000. Again, customs duties alone on all West India goods imported into Great Britain amounted to about £700,000.

⁷ Great Britain exported to the West Indies goods to the value of about £1,200,000. Of these about one-quarter were 'foreign' goods: Treas. Rev. Acc., Misc. Engl., 81; Add. MS. 12413. fo. 26; and Publ. Rec. Off., Treas., 38. 69.

finally, West Indian proprietors were scattered through most of the counties of England.⁸

But, before reviewing the deliberations on the subject, we must inquire whether any changes in the situation were produced by the war. As an immediate result of the outbreak of hostilities, trade relations between the British West Indies and the colonies in revolt became doubly prohibited—on the American side through the agreements against importation and exportation, and on the British by the prohibitory acts. The West Indians, drawing little comfort from the regrets expressed in their behalf by Congress⁹ and by Lord North,¹⁰ protested that existence under such conditions was impossible.¹¹ In view of later events it is interesting to note how they actually fared. From the outset extraordinary expedients were adopted for the securing of supplies. Prizes were offered in the islands for the raising of additional amounts of food-stuffs and for the taking of turtle and fish,¹² and the planters were thus persuaded to withdraw a portion of their land and negroes from the ordinary processes of cultivation. At the same time the shipments of food from Ireland were largely increased,¹³ the freer exportation of grain from Great Britain to the West Indies was sanctioned by statute,¹⁴ lumber was brought from the Baltic,¹⁵ and both lumber and provisions were secured to the largest possible extent from Canada, Florida, neighbouring islands belonging to neutral powers, and such parts of the thirteen colonies as were under British control.¹⁶ It must also be noted that the cargoes of the

⁸ Lord Shelburne declared in November 1778 that 'there was scarcely ten miles together throughout the country where the house and estate of a rich West Indian were not to be seen': *Parl. Hist.* xix. 1315. Persons resident in England possessed property to the value of £14,000,000 in the islands: Add. MS. 12413, fo. 20.

⁹ Congress, highly pleased at the intervention of Jamaica in behalf of the northern colonies, addressed to the assembly of that island on 25 July 1775 a letter of apology: 'We knew that we must sacrifice our own [interest] and (which gave us equal uneasiness) that of our friends who had never offended us, and who were connected with us by a sympathy of feelings under oppressions similar to our own': Ford, *Journals of Congress*, i. 79, 80, 194, 204.

¹⁰ *Parl. Hist.* xviii. 1056.

¹¹ e.g. the address of the assembly of Barbadoes, Publ. Rec. Off., Colonial Office, 28. 56. See also the resolutions passed on 7 February 1775 by the society of West Indian merchants and planters in London. The minutes of the meetings held by the society and its committee, 1769-83, are preserved at the offices of the present West India Committee in Seething Lane, London.

¹² A paper on the West India Trade, Publ. Rec. Off., Colonial Office, 325. 6; Laws of Jamaica, 16 Geo. III, c. 12, and 16 Geo. III, c. 16; *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, vi. 576, 579, 589.

¹³ Correspondence relating to the trade of the United States with the British colonies, Colonial Office, 325. 6; Naval Office lists for Jamaica, 1781, Board of Trade, 6. 176.

¹⁴ 13 Geo. III, c. 43, and 14 Geo. III, c. 5.

¹⁵ Paper on the West India trade, Colonial Office, 325. 6; Minutes of the West India Merchants for 11 May 1776.

¹⁶ Naval Office lists for Jamaica, 1781, Board of Trade, 6. 176; advertisement in

many American vessels taken by British men-of-war or privateers during the earlier years of the struggle were purchased for consumption in the islands,¹⁷ and that some of the West Indians unquestionably found means to defy the prohibitory acts and carry on trade with their rebel friends.¹⁸ The exact measure of success which attended these efforts is not easily estimated on account of the various misfortunes which fell upon the islands at this time. Several suffered capture, followed by the temporary ruin or emigration of many of the substantial planting class ; and all were more or less devastated by a series of violent hurricanes which occurred, most unfortunately, during the later years of the war. In order to form a proper estimate it will be well to confine our attention to Jamaica, which escaped capture, and was, from its relatively great size, best able to sustain the effects of the storms. There, we find, supplies were irregular and often insufficient,¹⁹ and the productive power of the island was substantially reduced.²⁰ Hence the planters were in 1783 particularly sensitive to the evils which might ensue should their old trade with the continental colonies be restricted or cut off. Yet the war had in other respects greatly strengthened the arguments which might be advanced for restricting, if not prohibiting, trade between the islands and the United States. The loyalty of the remaining continental colonies was felt to have merited some reward, and the migration to them of the American loyalists increased both their claims to consideration and their ability to engage in the West Indian trade. Again, the ship-owners could argue that rebels and aliens should not be allowed to engross an important branch of the British shipping industry, especially at a time when hundreds of vessels and thousands of seamen were rendered idle by the return of peace.²¹

Jamaica Mercury for 6 October 1779 ; Correspondence of Governor Dalling of Jamaica with governors and commanders in North America, Colonial Office, 5. 80.

¹⁷ Publ. Rec. Off., Admiralty, 1. 240 ; Minutes of the West India Merchants for 5 December 1777, Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, fo. 330.

¹⁸ Publ. Rec. Off., Admiralty, 1. 241. Lists and descriptions of the vessels seized by Admiral Parker's squadron. The trade carried on through St. Eustatius is well known.

¹⁹ Treas., 64. 72. Lists of imports in British bottoms at Kingston, Jamaica, during the war. The years of greatest scarcity were 1776-8. But the ruinous prices of food and lumber would indicate that the island was insufficiently supplied at other times. See *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, vii. 313, 314, 467, 577, for prices in 1780, 1782, and 1783 ; also the *Annual Register* for 1778, p. 304.

²⁰ Treas., 38. 269. Imports into England from the West Indies, 1774-83. The importation of sugar declined gradually from 1775 to 1781 by 50 per cent. Camden, speaking on 30 May 1777 on Chatham's motion for putting an end to hostilities in America, declared that two hundred families living in England on the revenues from their West Indian estates had already been obliged by losses to return to the islands : *Parl. Hist.* xix. 339.

²¹ The number of seamen without employment after 1783 was estimated at the remarkable figure of 60,000 : Evidence of Irving, the former Inspector-General of

When therefore in 1782 the British government faced the problem of settling the future commercial relations of the various parts of the Empire with the United States, it was confronted with decided differences of opinion in political and commercial circles as to the regulation of the West Indian trade. While these differences originated chiefly from the conflict of interests just noted, they were strongly accentuated for several months by the intense personal feeling to which the war had given rise. Thus the planters, in asking for absolute freedom of intercourse, gained support from many of those who sympathized most warmly with the American cause; while the shipowners, in demanding the exclusion of the Americans from the carrying trade, and the advocates of the loyal colonies, in urging that American produce should be barred from entering the islands, had on their side men who would not unwillingly have hindered the commercial development of the United States. There was even difference of opinion as to the method of procedure which the government should pursue. The majority of those interested advocated the conclusion of a commercial treaty in connexion with the treaty of peace, but others advised that the government should prescribe regulations by statute, and leave the Americans free to follow a similar course. Both methods were, in fact, tried by the three ministries which successively took the matter in charge.

The attempts of the first of these, the Shelburne administration, to arrive at a settlement need not detain us long. In the matter of negotiation nothing was done beyond the rejection of Franklin's proposal, made in July 1782, that each nation should, in matters of commerce, treat the subjects of the other exactly as it did its own.²² Nor was the ministry able to accomplish more through parliament. It will be remembered that Lord Shelburne, whose position had been far from strong at the opening of the session on 5 December 1782, was forced to resign on 24 February following, and that the unwillingness of George III to accept the coalition of Fox and Lord North occasioned a sort of interregnum in the government which lasted until 2 April. The time was evidently unsuitable for passing important legislation, but

Imports and Exports in America before the Committee of Trade, 1 April 1784, Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 3, fo. 156.

²² Publ. Rec. Off., Foreign Office, Misc. 563. Franklin's proposal as originally stated bore no direct reference to the British colonies: Oswald to Shelburne, 10 July 1782. But in the provisional treaty of peace agreed to by Oswald two months later Article IV stated that in all parts of the world the ships and merchants of the two nations should, in the ports belonging to both, 'enjoy the same protection and commercial privileges and be liable only to the same charges and duties'. A draft of these articles was enclosed by Oswald to Townshend in a dispatch of 7 October 1782. They were rejected by the cabinet, and Strachey was sent to Paris to obtain their revision. Among other concessions he secured the elimination of any mention of commerce in the treaty. See Smyth, *Franklin*, viii. 628.

the ministry was subjected to constant attack for its delay in providing for the resumption of trade with the United States,²³ and before the coalition ministry was formed, Pitt, as chancellor of the exchequer, attempted to deal with the matter through a bill introduced just after Shelburne's fall. This bill granted practically all that Franklin had asked in the preceding autumn without stipulating for any return :²⁴ its effect would have been to give the Americans not only the privilege of unrestricted trade in their produce and manufactures with the West Indies, but also that of sharing the carrying trade between the mother country and the islands. But for so hasty and complete a departure from the old commercial system the country was not prepared.

The bill was violently attacked by societies of merchants and chambers of commerce from the larger trading centres²⁵ as well as in parliament. In the commons Burke, Fox, Lord Sheffield, and Sir Grey Cooper joined in opposing it ; but the leading part was played by that urbane and astute politician, William Eden, who, as a former lord of the committee for trade,²⁶ spoke with authority on commercial matters, and who, moreover, was at this time strengthening his long-standing connexion with North²⁷ by working assiduously for the establishment of the coalition government.²⁸ Brushing aside alike the generous principles of Pitt's bill and Burke's pleas for ' measures of unsolicited liberality ', he declared that the amount of the concessions to be allowed to the Americans should be determined on the basis of strict bargaining. In order that the ministers might have time and authority to conclude the most favourable arrangement, he suggested that they should be given power to regulate the American trade for a limited period by orders in council.²⁹ This

²³ For attacks in the press see for instance the *Morning Chronicle* for 10 February 1783. Demands for action were also being heard in the house of commons, as in Burke's speech of 28 January reported in the *Morning Herald* and *Daily Advertiser* for 29 January 1783.

²⁴ The text is given in Edwards, *History of the West Indies* (London, 1801), ii. 491. The bill was introduced on 3 March.

²⁵ The West Indian merchants and planters in London took the lead in protesting against the bill and secured the co-operation of the chamber of commerce at Glasgow : Minutes of the West India Merchants for 6 and 21 March 1783.

²⁶ Knox Papers, *Hist. MSS. Comm., Reports on Various Collections*, vi. 265. Knox in 1779 wrote a highly interesting sketch of Eden's life and character. While malicious and not entirely trustworthy, it throws much light on Eden's political career. Unless Knox was a consummate hypocrite, a reconciliation between the two men must have taken place before 1781.

²⁷ Eden was one of the commissioners sent to America in 1778. His connexion with North began several years before this (*Hist. MSS. Comm., Stopford-Sackville MSS.*, ii. 10), and was considered extremely close at this time (*Hist. MSS. Comm., 10th Rep., Append.*, pt. vi, 54, Jenkinson to Robinson, 16 September 1782).

²⁸ Eden's two patrons, Loughborough (Wedderburn) and Carlisle, it may be noted, became members of the coalition cabinet.

²⁹ Eden made this proposal as early as 7 March : *London Chronicle*, 8 March 1783.

scheme, designed for the benefit of the incoming administration, found considerable support, and Pitt, failing to get even the principle of his measure approved, finally proposed that consideration of the whole matter should be deferred until the first week in April.³⁰ Before the discussion was resumed the government was in the hands of Fox and North.

Fox, as secretary for the foreign department, first took the matter in charge. Convinced that it was too important for hasty settlement by means of legislation,³¹ he adopted Eden's plan of procedure by dropping Pitt's bill,³² and passed an enabling act to give authority to the Crown to regulate all trade with America by order in council for six months.³³ Meanwhile he reopened negotiations with the American commissioners at Paris. But if his method was the method of Eden, his views, as defined in his instructions to Hartley, his envoy at Paris, were not far removed from those of Pitt. He was quite willing that the Americans should trade freely in their own ships with the West Indies, provided that they carried raw produce only.³⁴ That they should trade between the islands and the mother country the government, he said, could not permit until a full investigation had been held, since English 'prejudices' on the matter were so strong.³⁵ Hartley received dispatches to this effect under the date of 10 June. He heard nothing further until he was informed, not from home, but by the American commissioners, of the issue on 2 July of an order in council for the regulation of the West Indian trade.³⁶ Since this order embodied the policy actually maintained during the ten years following, and since its provisions seem to indicate that the government's views had suddenly and entirely changed on one of the two essential points at issue, it deserves to be examined with some care. Its terms are well known. The West Indians were allowed to import American lumber, flour, bread, grain, vegetables, and live stock, and to

³⁰ The debates continued from 5 March to 2 April. Pitt in his defence showed none of his usual self-confidence, admitting at the outset that he was 'by no means tenacious of any part of the bill', and laying himself open to charges by Sheffield of weakness and vacillation. Reports of his principal speeches are found in the *Morning Chronicle* for 6 and 8 March and 3 April 1783.

³¹ *Memorials and Correspondence of C. J. Fox* (London, 1853), ii, 122. On 8 April Fox wrote to the king that, since any action on Pitt's bill would make necessary an immediate decision on the matter, he had resolved to postpone such action until further progress had been made in the negotiations with the American commissioners.

³² On 9 April Fox carried without division a motion further to postpone the consideration of Pitt's bill.

³³ 23 Geo. III, c. 39.

³⁴ Fox to Hartley, 10 April 1783: Publ. Rec. Off., Foreign Office, America, ser. I B.

³⁵ Fox to Hartley, 10 June 1783: *ibid.* At this time the one question at issue was the participation of American vessels in the carrying trade between the islands and Great Britain.

³⁶ Privy Council Register, Geo. III, xxi, fo. 316.

export to the United States rum, sugar, molasses, coffee, nuts, ginger, and pimento. But the importation of American meat, dairy produce, and fish was forbidden, and the trade was confined entirely to British ships.

That this apparent alteration in the views of the ministry represents no change of opinion on the part of Fox is evident from his dispatches to Hartley of a later date,³⁷ but it is certain that the cabinet was divided and that the order represents a victory for the more conservative section which attached itself to North.³⁸ Not only is this supposition on the face of it reasonable, but there is evidence that the order was drafted, on the instructions of North himself, by William Knox, who had been for twelve years under-secretary for the colonies in the North administration.³⁹ Knox, in fact, claims the credit of having suggested it and secured its adoption by the privy council in face of the opposition of Fox and Burke;⁴⁰ and, while his statements are unsupported save by general expressions of congratulation on the part of his friends,⁴¹ there is no reason for considering them untrue. Finally, we know that Eden was an active member of the committee of the privy council, in the hands of which affairs of trade had temporarily been placed,⁴² that he warmly approved of the order, and that he was in close touch with Knox.⁴³ Other influences were also at work. The anxiety of the ministry as to the attitude of the Americans had just been relieved by the news that their ports were open to British vessels⁴⁴ and by the arrival

³⁷ 'I still adhere in every particular to the system upon which my first instructions to you were planned': Fox to Hartley, 29 July 1783, Foreign Office, America, ser. 1 B.

³⁸ Adams received from England exaggerated reports to this effect. 'My advices from England are that Lord Sheffield with his friends . . . are making a party unfriendly to us; that the ministry adopt their sentiments and measures; that Fox has lost his popularity and devoted himself to North, who has the King's ear and disposes of places . . .': Adams to Livingston, the Hague, 2 August 1783, *Works*, viii. 130.

³⁹ Letter of Colonel Augustus North to Knox, dated by Knox, May 1783: Knox Papers, *Hist. MSS. Comm., Var. Coll.* vi. 191. Colonel North, on Lord North's behalf, requests Knox to prepare the draft of an act '“for regulating the commerce between our remaining British colonies, our West India Islands, and the United States, as well as any other acts it may be necessary to pass this Session” with regard to the intercourse between England and America'. Subjoined is a memorandum by Knox stating that, on account of the enabling act, legislation was unnecessary, and that he had therefore drafted orders in council instead: *ibid.* Sheffield, writing to Knox, 3 July 1783, expressed pleasure that the order had been passed exactly as Knox drew it.

⁴⁰ Knox to Lord Walsingham, 20 August 1787: *ibid.* 198.

⁴¹ Sheffield to Knox, 3 July 1783; Viscount Sackville to Knox, 4 July 1783 and 20 August 1783: *ibid.* 191, 192. Sackville expressed satisfaction that North had adopted Knox's plan, and declared that the cabinet would not have known how to proceed without him.

⁴² Report of a meeting of the Committee on Plantations, 15 May 1783: Privy Council, Unbound Papers.

⁴³ Eden to Knox, 11 February 1782: Knox Papers, *ubi supra*, p. 240.

⁴⁴ Hartley to Fox, 20 June 1783: Foreign Office, America, ser. 1 B.

of American ships in the United Kingdom. Lord Sheffield had just published his cleverly conceived and ably written *Observations on the Commerce of the American States*, for the express purpose of combating the principles underlying Pitt's bill. The popularity of the book was so great, and its effect so marked,⁴⁵ that it called forth from the American commissioners bitter complaints,⁴⁶ and from Edward Gibbon a warm eulogy of its author as 'the defender if not the saviour of the navigation acts'.⁴⁷ Whether or not John Adams was right in believing that the decision of the ministry was also swayed by the influence of jealous European powers is not clear.⁴⁸

The July order in council, as I have said, embodies the policy pursued during the ten years following. Yet it was not regarded at the time as more than a temporary expedient,⁴⁹ and the most important part of its history consists in the fact that it was maintained and in the end permanently adopted. Measures were soon set on foot for inducing the government to grant more liberal terms. From America came threats of retaliation,⁵⁰ threats which were to some extent put into force by Maryland⁵¹ and Virginia⁵² before the close of the year. From the West Indies, where prices had risen from 50 to 100 per cent. on the publication of the order,⁵³ and where there was a serious appre-

⁴⁵ Sheffield was congratulated on every side and was given the freedom of the city of Glasgow: *Auckland Corr.* i. 56; *European Magazine* for September, November, and December 1783; *Scot's Magazine* for December 1783; Knox Papers, *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, Var. Coll. vi. 191; *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, *MSS. in Royal Institution*, iv. 207.

⁴⁶ Hartley to Fox, 17 and 24 July 1783: Foreign Office, America, ser. 1 B.

⁴⁷ 'The navigation act, the palladium of Great Britain, was defended and perhaps saved by his pen': *Memoirs* (London, 1827), ii. 242.

⁴⁸ Adams, *Works* (Boston, 1853), viii. 74, 85, 90, 98. Adams feared that England, France, and the other powers possessing colonies in the West Indies would agree to exclude American vessels from any participation in the carrying trade of the islands. 'The French . . . will say everything they can think of to persuade the English to deprive us of the trade of their West India Islands. They have already, with their emissaries, been the chief cause of the change of sentiments in London, on this head, against us.' But evidence is wanting to justify this conclusion. Certainly none exists in the *Despatches from Paris, 1784-90*, published by the Camden Society, 3rd series, xvi, xvii.

⁴⁹ Fox to Hartley, 29 July 1783: Foreign Office, America, ser. 1 B; *Morning Chronicle*, 19 March 1784, reporting a speech of Eden in the house of commons, 18 March.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Pennsylvania Packet*, 4 August and 12 December 1783.

⁵¹ *Laws of Maryland* (Annapolis, 1787), session of 3 November to 26 December 1783, c. 29. This act imposed a charge of 5s. per ton on British vessels entering and clearing and an additional duty of 2 per cent. *ad valorem* on British goods imported in British ships.

⁵² Henning, *Statutes of Virginia*, xi. 313, 8th of the Commonwealth, c. 5. This act conferred upon Congress power to forbid the importation of British West Indian produce in British bottoms.

⁵³ Answer to the Heads of Inquiry contained in the letter of the Secretary of State, 11 November 1784: Colonial Office, 137. 84. The answer is dated 1 February 1785.

hension of famine, came a series of protests and appeals.⁵⁴ Even in England a vigorous press campaign was set up. The coalition stuck to its guns and through a new enabling act extended the operation of the order in council until April 1784. But the opposition was as keen as ever when in December 1783 Pitt, the former advocate of the freest of intercourse, assumed charge of the government.

From the outset Pitt showed that he was prepared to afford the opponents of the existing restrictions every consideration. Negotiations were entered upon with the merchants with a view to a compromise, and it was suggested that West Indian ports should be opened to American vessels of less than eighty tons,⁵⁵ vessels, in other words, which could not easily cross the ocean nor serve as a nursery for the American fleet.⁵⁶ When the merchants, probably through over-confidence, refused to accept any limitation of tonnage, the matter was referred to the newly constituted committee of trade for investigation and report.⁵⁷ The voluminous minutes of this investigation well reward detailed examination,⁵⁸ but we may here confine ourselves to the methods which the commissioners pursued, the principles upon which they acted, and the results at which they arrived. Their method deserves high praise. Working patiently for almost three months,⁵⁹ they sought, obtained, and sifted evidence from every promising source in a manner which leaves no doubt as to their thoroughness and their honest desire to discover the truth.

The conclusion at which they arrived⁶⁰ was that the loyal colonies were already able to supply a large proportion of the lumber and provisions which the West Indies required and would in about three years be ready to furnish the whole. If they failed to consume all the rum for which the planters had to find an American market, the people of the United States, to whom it was indispensable, would be glad to purchase the rest. For the carrying trade British shipping, operating on the old three-cornered principle,

⁵⁴ Resolutions of the Committee of West India Merchants, 26 November 1783: Colonial Office, 137. 82; *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxxix. 840.

⁵⁵ Library of Congress, Franklin MSS., 1287. Benjamin Vaughan, writing to Henry Laurens, 27 February 1784, gives from memory an account of these negotiations. See also the minutes of the meeting of West Indian planters and merchants at which the proposals were discussed, Colonial Office, 137. 83.

⁵⁶ The explanation is furnished in correspondence relative to the intercourse of the United States with the British colonies: Colonial Office, 325-6.

⁵⁷ Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 3, fo. 1. The committee was established on 5 March 1784, and on the same day a petition of the West Indian merchants and planters, which constituted the basis of the inquiry, was referred to it.

⁵⁸ The mass of evidence presented before the committee is invaluable for the light it throws on the West Indian trade before and during the war of the American Revolution.

⁵⁹ 10 March to 31 May.

⁶⁰ Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 3, fo. 276 ff.

would undoubtedly suffice. Retaliatory measures on the part of the Americans were not to be feared, and could in any event be defeated by the ease with which goods might be smuggled into their country and by the opening of free ports which their merchants would be sure to frequent. Hence the islands could be cultivated at a 'sufficient' profit without the freedom of intercourse for which the planters asked, although such profit might be less than that obtained before the war. On the basis of these conclusions, all of which were more or less contradicted by the allegations of the West Indians, the committee proceeded to recommend the adoption, for the time being, of a set of regulations corresponding in all essentials with those already in force. It is interesting, too, to note that the recommendations were based not only on facts, but on certain clearly stated principles. The privilege of supplying the islands as far as lay in their power belonged to the United Kingdom and the loyal colonies, because they were 'by every right exclusively entitled to the advantages to be derived from the trade', while the carrying trade was to be in British hands, because thus British naval strength might be increased and the sailors left idle by the close of the war might be prevented from entering the navy of the United States. A fuller vindication of the policy of the coalition or a clearer statement of some of the old commercial principles could scarcely have been offered.

Well grounded as the existing regulations were thus declared to be, they secured no permanent adoption for the space of more than four years. Enabling acts and orders in council, which differed in no essential respect from those of 1783, were issued in unbroken succession until 1788.⁶¹ The ministry, as it admitted, was merely testing the system,⁶² and to numerous protests and appeals returned steadily the answer that no reason for altering it had been shown.⁶³ Whether or not the ministers were justified in adhering to their position we must now inquire.

The conclusions reached by the committee in 1784 with regard to the possibilities of supply from British North America were largely at fault;⁶⁴ but, since the government at no time attempted

⁶¹ The last but one of the enabling acts, 27 Geo. III, c. 7, provided for more rigid enforcement. The illegal introduction of American produce was made punishable by the forfeiture of both vessel and cargo. No change, save in phrasing, is to be observed in the successive orders in council: Privy Council Register, George III, xxi. 614, xxii. 91, 186, 351, xxiii. 121, xxiv. 93, xxv. 126.

⁶² Grenville in the house of commons, 11 February 1788: *Morning Chronicle*, 12 February 1788.

⁶³ e.g. Privy Council Register, George III, xxiv. 56, and Publ. Rec. Off., Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 7, fo. 178.

⁶⁴ Evidence of Ainslee before the Committee of Trade, March 1789: Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 11, fo. 220, 216; statistics on the trade of the West Indies prepared by Irving, Inspector-General of Imports and Exports for Great

to forbid the importation of raw produce from the United States, this fact is interesting rather than significant. In other respects the committee made few mistakes. The carrying trade was immediately and completely taken over by British shipping.⁶⁵ According to the most trustworthy statistics the supply of food appears to have been quite sufficient; ⁶⁶ and, while periods of scarcity and distress occurred, they would seem to have been attributable rather to the hurricanes of 1784, 1785, and 1786, than to the restrictions laid upon the American trade.⁶⁷ American measures of retaliation, needless to say, broke down, although attempted or recommended to Congress by nearly all the states.⁶⁸ It is true, indeed, that more lumber had to be obtained within the islands, that prices both of food and lumber were high,⁶⁹ and that illicit trade with the United States reached large proportions.⁷⁰ But such 'inconveniences' were not to be considered so long as the 'sufficient' profit promised in 1784 was obtained, and the shipping, exports, and revenue of the mother country were fostered. When we note that by 1788 the trade of the islands with the mother country had increased both in exports and imports by some twenty-five per cent. over what it had been

Britain, Colonial Office, 390. 5. Knox, writing to Camden, 9 June 1804, admitted that the islands could not yet be supplied from British North America: *Hist. MSS. Comm., Var. Coll.*, vi. 221.

⁶⁵ Correspondence relating to the intercourse of the United States with the British colonies: Board of Trade, Min. of Comm. of Trade, 11, fo. 203, and Colonial Office, 325-6.

⁶⁶ For instance, Treas., 64. 72, contains lists signed by Davison, the collector at Jamaica, showing that in 1784 that island received 41,000 barrels of bread and flour (as compared with an average of about 35,000 barrels before 1775) and 14,000 feet of wood (as compared with 15,000 feet before 1775). 75 per cent. of the bread and flour and 65 per cent. of the lumber were from the United States. As Jamaica was one of the last islands visited by vessels from America, it was apt to be less fully supplied than the others. More wood was cut on the island than before 1775.

⁶⁷ A committee of the assembly of Jamaica reported that 15,000 slaves had perished in the island from starvation or insufficient nutrition during the years immediately following 1783, and that the scarcity of food was the result both of the hurricanes and the exclusion of American vessels: *Journ. of the Assoc. of Jamaica*, viii. 429-30. Edwards (*Hist. of Jamaica*, 1801, ii. 511), enlarging upon this report, censured the government for its policy. It must be noted that the committee, in framing its report, was attempting to explain the attacks then being directed against the slave trade, and that its assertions were not based on evidence.

⁶⁸ Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, all conferred upon Congress power to retaliate in commercial matters against Great Britain. (See the laws of these states in the collection of the Pennsylvania Historical Society at Philadelphia.) But when Congress, in accordance with a report prepared by Jefferson and Chase, asked in April 1784 for power to regulate the trade of all the states for fifteen years, only three states gave their unreserved consent: *Journals of Congress*, iv. 392, 601-2.

⁶⁹ Grenville, speaking in the house of commons, 14 March 1787, admitted that the price of provisions and lumber purchased in America 'had risen far beyond all former precedent': *Morning Chronicle*, 15 March 1787.

⁷⁰ Answer to Heads of Inquiry in the letter of the Secretary of State, February 1785: Colonial Office, 137. 84.

before the war,⁷¹ and that nearly six hundred vessels were employed in its transport,⁷² we must conclude that the objects of the ministry had been successfully accomplished, and that no reason existed for deferring longer the enactment of a statute which should make the existing regulations permanent. In February 1788 Grenville, the vice-president of the committee of trade, introduced such a bill, which, after encountering but a flicker of the old opposition, was easily passed.⁷³

With the placing of this bill upon the statute book, the events with which this paper deals came practically to an end. A system from which the West Indians had anticipated and prophesied sheer ruin had not terminated the growth of their prosperity. Regulations which the three leading statesmen of the time had condemned had been investigated, tested, and made permanent, because in point of fact they gave the results which in those days were most desired. The contexture of the whole, to use Burke's phrase, was but little torn, and if there was depreciation in value of any of the parts, it was mainly in the part now belonging to the Thirteen States, powerless in their divisions to resist the imposition of this last navigation act. Hence, during the five years which followed, there was no change in the policy of the government or in its results, while the West Indians, engrossed in their efforts to prevent the suppression of the slave trade, relinquished their opposition. Yet the system established by North and his friends was to have no extended existence, and when, in January 1793, England expelled Chauvelin, the envoy of the French Republic, it was already near virtual abrogation. How the government during the years of the great war attempted to secure a formal observance of the act of 1788 by passing annual acts of indemnity for the West Indian governors who were forced to permit its violation, how attempts to arrive at more logical conditions were made in the negotiations with Jay and with Munro and Pinekney, and how finally in 1806 American ships were by statute admitted, under slight restrictions, to West Indian ports cannot here be told. But a review of these events, by demonstrating the ease with which the Americans were able to recapture the West Indian trade, would probably strengthen the conclusion that, from the eighteenth-century point of view, the British government was both wise and successful in its commercial policy in the West Indies during the ten years of peace.

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⁷¹ Imports into Great Britain from the West Indies, 1788-9, averaged in value £4,000,000 (Treas., 64. 275) as compared with £3,100,000 in 1772-3 (Treas., 64. 276). Exports to the West Indies, 1788-9, were valued at £1,600,000 (Colonial Office, 390. 5).

⁷² Colonial Office, 390. 5, Miscellaneous Statistics on Trade.

⁷³ 2S Geo. III, c. 6: *Journals of the House of Commons*, xliii. 227, 278.

THE WEST INDIA TRADE BEFORE THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

THE subject with which this paper deals has not lacked for treatment within the last few years but the need for more minute study is clearly apparent. The actual mechanism of the trade has not as yet been sufficiently examined. Only vaguely do we know the kind of vessels employed, the routes followed, and the methods of sale, remittance, and insurance. It has been the writer's endeavor to throw some light on these minor points through the study of documents not formerly brought under contribution.¹ But the difficulties in the way of successful presentation are great. One deals with methods of operation so various as almost to defy classification, with statistics notoriously inaccurate,² and with weights, measures, and money values of local and changing determination.³ Some indulgence may then be granted if the picture presented seems unduly intricate and if finality is at times lacking in the conclusions presented.

In the matter of goods actually exchanged and the localities whence they were derived little can be added to the store of information long accessible, and a brief restatement of the main facts will suffice. The needs of the British West Indies for provisions and lumber were met alike by all of the continental colonies; but of the

¹ In particular the Minutes of the Committee of Trade in the Public Record Office, London (cited P. R. O., B. T. 5); the Clifford Papers and the Pemberton Papers in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (cited Clifford Papers and Pemberton Papers); the uncatalogued family papers of Joseph H. Coates, Esq., of Philadelphia (cited Coates Papers); and the collection of commercial correspondence recently published by the Massachusetts Historical Society as *Commerce of Rhode Island*, vols. I. and II. (cited *Com. of R. I.*).

² The figures furnished by the few surviving official records are nearly always far below the true ones: report of the former inspector-general of exports and imports in America, Irving, to the Committee of Trade, P. R. O., B. T. 5: 1, p. 135; report of the governor of Jamaica on the trade of the island, P. R. O., C. O. 137: 33. McPherson (*Annals of Commerce*, III. 572, note) also calls attention to this fact.

³ Thus a "thousand" feet of lumber might represent 1000 or 1200 ft., a barrel of flour might be "lightly" or firmly packed, and a hogshead of sugar might contain 12 cwt. or 14. Finally, the pound sterling was worth anywhere from 28 to 160 shillings in the currencies of the various colonies. *Negotiator's Magazine* (London, 1754), pp. 213, 214.

latter, certain groups largely controlled the export of particular articles. Pennsylvania and New York, with some assistance from Maryland and Virginia, offered virtually the whole amount of flour and bread; New England, through the industry of its citizens and their trade with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, stood responsible for most of the fish and oil, though large quantities of both reached the islands through the markets of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York. Pennsylvania again led in supplying beef, pork, hams, and tongues, but her exports were heavily supplemented by those of Virginia and North Carolina. Corn and peas came from the same colonies with the addition of Maryland, while South Carolina and Georgia made their principal contribution in rice.⁴ Lumber was to be had at most of the North American ports, but here again distinctions must be made. The southern colonies led in supplying staves of red oak for sugar hogsheads and of white oak for rum casks. Their planks of oak and yellow pine stood in great demand, and their cypress shingles were much preferred to the white cedar shingles sold by the colonies of the middle group. Only in the export of boards and scantling did the New England colonies hold first place, and even there only in the quantity, not the quality, of the goods supplied.⁵ Besides these staples many other articles found place in the cargoes which passed constantly to the tropics: horses and other live stock, minor food-stuffs such as butter, cheese, potatoes, and fruit, or manufactures in the shape of soap, lamp oil, pottery, chintzes, and shoes. A widely varied assortment was usually to be found in a single ship. The return loadings from the islands were more restricted in variety and in bulk. Rum, molasses, and sugar naturally predominated in the order named, but coffee and cotton, ginger and pimento, mahogany and logwood, with hides and indigo all found frequent mention in the bills of lading.

The general dimensions of the trade may be estimated with fair accuracy as regards the southbound cargoes, and in so far as we may rely upon official returns. One year with another, the continental colonies exported to the islands goods to a value in American ports of £500,000 sterling. By the addition of the heavy freight charges which commodities so great in bulk as compared with cost of production necessarily bore, a value of £725,000 sterling in West

⁴ P. R. O., B. T. 5: 1, pp. 91, 93, 124; Br. Mus., Add. MSS. 12404. McPherson (*Annals*, III. 572) points out that Pa., Mass., Conn., Va., N. Y., R. I., S. C., N. H., and Md. were the heaviest exporters to the West Indies in the order named.

⁵ See note 4, also P. R. O., B. T. 5: 1, pp. 103, 124, 140, 152; Br. Mus., Add. MSS. 22677, f. 69.

Indian ports was reached.⁶ The subjoined table⁷ will show the quantities in which the principal articles involved were sent to the islands. As regards the northbound cargoes no satisfactory estimates either as to values or as to quantities can be made. The West Indians paid for American provisions and lumber in shipments of their produce to North America, in shipments to England, in cash,⁸ and in bills of exchange.⁹ The North Americans often secured part or all of their return loadings in the French and Dutch islands, and succeeded in entering large quantities of this foreign produce as goods of British origin. Hence it could not even then be ascertained what returns in the direct shipment of their own produce the British islands were able to make. The most trustworthy of the various contemporary estimates places the value of these shipments at £400,000 sterling in West Indian¹⁰ or £420,000 sterling in North

⁶ B. T. 5: 1, pp. 12, 158, 159, 160; *ibid.*, 4, p. 468. Irving estimated that the freight charges on lumber and corn amounted to 100 per cent. of the prime cost, on all articles to 45 per cent. Rates ranged from 35 to 40 shillings per ton. The committee of West India merchants, against whom Irving was testifying, practically agreed to his figures.

⁷ This table shows the quantities of American provisions and lumber annually consumed in the British West Indies during the years 1771-1773. It is compiled from three tables furnished by Irving (B. T. 5: 1, pp. 90-102), by Edward Long (Br. Mus., Add. MSS. 12404), and by a copy of a report issued by the London Custom House in March, 1775, and signed by Stanley, the secretary (Br. Mus., Add. MSS. 12431, f. 170).

Bread and flour,	130,000 bbls.
Beef and pork,	15,000 "
Fish,	17,000 hogshheads
	16,000 bbls.
	12,000 quintals
Corn,	400,000 bush.
Rice,	20,000 bbls.
Boards and planks,	21,000 thousand
Staves and heading,	17,000 "
Hoops,	1,900 "
Shingles,	16,000 "

⁸ See note 73.

⁹ See note 76.

¹⁰ This is the estimate furnished by Irving to the Committee of Trade. The conflicting nature of the evidence both as to the quantities of British West India produce exported to the continental colonies and as to the value of the whole illustrates the difficulty of reaching final conclusions in regard to many phases of colonial trade at this time. Custom-house records even when discoverable are practically worthless. Bryan Edwards (*Thoughts on the Late Proceedings of Government*, London, 1784) points out that many of the bays, creeks, and shipping places in the islands were remote from the ports of entry and that the masters of American vessels, in order to save delay, made manifests and took out

American ports.¹¹

In approaching the methods by which this trade was carried on it is best to consider first that part—a part constituting indeed all but a small fraction of the whole—which was completely or principally in American hands. And here at once there becomes necessary a certain mental readjustment. One must commence by discarding all ideas of business corporations, of shipping lines and liners, of fixed routes, of insurance companies—in short, all familiar notions of the present mechanism of commerce. The American merchants of the day traded individually or in loose partnerships. Their largest ventures seldom involved sums of more than a few hundred pounds¹² and the most wealthy and prosperous were not above giving attention to the minutiae of small transactions. Many of their letters to captains and commercial correspondents read like communications between familiar friends. Price schedules and accounts of sales jostle continually with inquiries concerning the health of the recipient and his “dear” family, with announcements of the sending of gifts and with the extending of invitations, all couched in terms of the utmost cordiality. Moreover the business methods

clearances in advance. In his opinion they usually took out more produce than they entered. But clearances were at times granted for empty casks and hogsheads, which were filled in the foreign islands. That officials in continental ports were guilty of permitting the entry of foreign produce as goods of British origin is well known. (See, *e. g.*, G. L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy 1754-1765*, New York, 1907, p. 239.) Nor are the estimates of the best-informed contemporaries of greater value. At the great inquiry held by the Committee of Trade in 1784, while Irving presented the figures given above, the West India merchants claimed that the British islands exported to the continent produce almost equal in value to the provisions and lumber received. But the committee decided that British West India produce was accepted in payment for only one-half the articles sent from the southern colonies, one-quarter of those from the middle group, and one-tenth of those from New England. P. R. O., B. T. 5: 1, pp. 25, 159, 241. Reports of the governors of Jamaica on the trade of that island in 1765 (P. R. O., C. O. 137: 33) and in 1774 (C. O. 137: 69) show the same startling discrepancies. Of contemporary writers Chalmers (*Opinions on Interesting Subjects*, London, 1784) follows Irving; Sheffield (*Observations*, London, 1784) and McPherson (*Annals*, III. 403) seem to accept the Jamaica report of 1765; and Bryan Edwards (*Thoughts on the Late Proceedings of Government*) places the value of British produce exported to the continent at £460,000. Still more futile must be any attempt to state with exactness the quantity in which any one commodity entered into the trade. For rum, *e. g.*, the estimates vary from 2,800,000 to 4,070,000 gallons.

¹¹ Whether or not this estimate of freight charges is accurate the amount must have been relatively small. The freight from Barbados to Philadelphia on a hogshead of rum, worth approximately £20 (currency), was only 5 per cent. of that sum. Hist. Soc. of Pa., Wharton Papers, Journal of Charles Wharton, p. 534.

¹² Taking the insurance placed upon eleven cargoes we reach an average of £788 sterling. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 120, 148, 149, 185, 239, 249, 474.

of these men were as easy and unconventional as their epistolary style. Not that they lacked keenness of business sense. Rather was it the case that their very alertness, their intentness upon gain, led them to seek profit whenever, wherever, and however it was to be found. Their ships, like the tramp steamers of to-day, frequently wandered, without prearranged plans, from port to port, the ship-captains buying, selling, bartering, or carrying freights as occasion offered.¹³ Hence it resulted that the West Indian trade, instead of being a mere exchange of commodities between two groups of colonies, stood as part of a greater system: stood in intimate connection alike with the coasting traffic and with lines of commerce extending to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland,¹⁴ Great Britain, southern Europe, and Africa. Some analysis is required for making this clear. The connection of the West Indian with the coasting trade was twofold. Southbound cargoes of the former were often assembled by the use of coasters at the larger American ports;¹⁵ northbound cargoes were distributed in like manner.¹⁶ But, in what probably constituted a majority of the voyages, the connection was closer still. The assembling and distribution were operated by the same vessels which plied to and from the islands, and operated moreover in conjunction with coastwise traffic of the ordinary sort. On the way south to the Caribbees goods laden in New England might be partially or wholly exchanged for those of the middle and southern colonies; on the way north rum and sugar might gradually be displaced by rice or flour, bread or iron.¹⁷ Again West Indian and coasting trades alike were closely related to the New England fisheries and to the commerce carried on by the "continental" colonies with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.¹⁸ In this last-men-

¹³ See note 21.

¹⁴ Sir Hugh Palliser, governor of Newfoundland 1764-1769, reported that the trade of New England with that island occupied 104 vessels of an aggregate tonnage of 6048. The amount realized from the sale of the northbound cargoes and of the vessels sometimes sold with them averaged more than £100,000 sterling per year. *B. T.* 5: 1, p. 147.

¹⁵ Coates Papers, William Redwood to Samuel Coates, Newport, July 6, 1773.

¹⁶ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 134.

¹⁷ As the colonies of the southern group had little shipping of their own New England vessels sometimes left West Indian produce at southern ports even while sailing southwards on fresh visits to the islands. The same vessels sometimes plied between the islands and the southern colonies without returning north. *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 103, 104, 125; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 132, 133, 179.

¹⁸ Evidence of Irving and Sir Hugh Palliser before the Committee of Trade, *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 93, 94, 146-148; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 406, 417, 460. In 1771 the New Englanders purchased 67,000 quintals of dried fish (principally cod and mackerel) at Newfoundland. The rum used was distilled in New England.

tioned commerce, rum, molasses, and sugar on the one hand, and, on the other, fish of the inferior grade consumed by West Indian slaves, seem to have been the articles most frequently exchanged. Vessels which engaged in the fisheries during the summer months turned south on the approach of winter, bartered their wares along the Atlantic coast as far down as Georgia, and at times concluded their voyages in the Caribbean Sea. Less significant, although perhaps more interesting, is the connection of the West Indian trade with American commerce farther afield. Vessels of the larger sort, having discharged their lumber and provisions in the islands, frequently received there cargoes for the British islands or southern Europe.¹⁹ Indeed the master of such a ship reaching Bridgetown or Kingston might not be sure whether London or Philadelphia would be his next port of call.²⁰ The return voyage might reverse the process. A North American vessel returning home from Great Britain might be ordered to proceed first to the West Indies either directly or via Madeira or Portugal. At the last-named places wine or salt would be added to the British manufactures and Irish provisions of which her original lading was composed.²¹ Last of all there is to be noted the connection of the West Indian commerce with the American slave-trade. Slave vessels, loaded and despatched in North American ports, carried slaves from Africa to the West Indies for sale there.²² From the West Indies they returned home

¹⁹ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 362, 390, 392, 396, 403, 442, 443. The produce taken down would not purchase a cargo for Europe, but additions were bought with bills of exchange. *B. T.* 5: 1, p. 54.

²⁰ Clifford Papers, V. 178. Whether the vessel went to Europe probably depended upon the freight rates, *i. e.*, the possible profits involved. Coates Papers, Edward Dawers to Israel Pemberton, jr. and Company, Antigua, August 27, 1746. On the other hand some American vessels were regularly assigned to such trade. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 433.

²¹ The shipment of Irish produce directly to the colonies was not legal until 1778, 18 Geo. III., c. 55; 20 Geo. III., c. 10. It appears however to have taken place. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 299, 304, 306, 307. An interesting voyage was that of the brig *Charlotte* belonging to Aaron Lopez in 1769-1770. She arrived October 29, 1769, at Bristol with pig-iron, mahogany, and logwood. Finding no freight for the West Indies and being herself unsalable, she carried sugar, rice, iron, and tin plates as freight to Dublin. There she took on 300 barrels of beef for Jamaica and received also the order to pick up 30 pipes of wine at Madeira. She was insured to Jamaica, the Bay of Honduras, and Rhode Island. After having been driven into Whitehaven by bad weather, she arrived at Jamaica in June and at Honduras before September. She reached Charleston with mahogany before December 7, 1770. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 295, 298-301, 304, 307, 308, 309, 316, 335, 336, 354.

²² Just before the Revolution good adult slaves sold in the West Indies for about £35 sterling per head. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 425, 428, 457.

before commencing a fresh voyage,²³ and there is every reason to suppose that they obtained some share of the carrying trade from the islands to the continent.²⁴

As to the shipping employed, the greatest variety is again to be observed. Brigs were in the majority but sloops, schooners, and snows²⁵ were to be found in great numbers. Vessels which engaged from time to time in transatlantic trade were naturally of different type from those which kept to the western hemisphere. The latter were small, averaging at about forty tons²⁶ and provided only with single decks, on which much of the cargo was placed. The former were double-decked craft²⁷ of 100 to 300 tons, the majority falling between 100 and 150.²⁸ As the "out" cargoes south and east bound were much more bulky than the return loadings either from the West Indies or from Europe, and as shipbuilding was in general cheaper in North America than in Europe,²⁹ these vessels were often sold in British and West Indian ports.³⁰ In the matter of owner-

²³ *E. g.*, the *Adventure*. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 397, 428, 473; II. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 456, 461, 462, 467, 468.

²⁵ A snow was a vessel which carried, besides two principal masts, a small third mast placed behind the main mast and equipped with a trysail.

²⁶ As to the number and tonnage of the American vessels trading in the British islands the evidence is very conflicting. From the testimony offered by the London committee of West India merchants, by Irving, by William Knox, and others before the Committee of Trade, B. T. 5: 1, pp. 12, 13, 38, 158; from the report in 1774 of the governor of Jamaica, C. O. 137: 69; and from Naval Office Lists, C. O. 142: 16, it has been calculated that some 400 vessels of 40 to 50 tons and something less than half that number with tonnage averaging about three times as much were engaged in the traffic. These vessels, and particularly the smaller ones, made two or three round trips per year. Long points out that the smaller craft enjoyed great advantages in being able to sail over bars and into small streams and ports. Br. Mus., Add. MSS. 12404. Many of them were probably built and operated as co-operative enterprises by groups of persons who were not primarily merchants or shipowners. Letter in the *Morning Chronicle* and *London Advertiser* for January 23, 1784.

²⁷ Vessels of 100 tons or upwards were nearly always double-decked. Smaller vessels could cross the ocean but could not be insured. B. T. 5: 1, p. 14.

²⁸ The dimensions of two of these vessels are given as follows. A brigantine of 125 tons burthen—length by the keel 52 ft., beam 20 ft., hold 9½ ft. and between decks 4 ft. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 219. For a larger vessel, length by keel 74 ft., beam 25 ft., hold 12 ft., between decks 4 ft. 8 in. Coates Papers, Elias Bland to John Reynell, London, May 31, 1746. The more perishable part of the cargo was apparently placed between decks. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 441.

²⁹ James Anderson, who before the American Revolution had been employed by a Glasgow firm as agent for the building of ships at Boston, testified before the Committee of Trade that the best American-built vessels were as costly as British-built craft of the same tonnage but that an inferior type could be constructed more cheaply in America. B. T. 5: 3, p. 486.

³⁰ B. T. 5: 1, pp. 13, 54; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 6, 104, 118, 144, 147, 151, 152, 160, 191, 219, 357, 401. The prices realized ranged from £250 sterling to £900 sterling. Vessels in good condition brought £500 sterling or more.

ship, fixed rules were again wanting. While in numerous cases merchants or captains appeared as sole owners, joint proprietorship seems to have been the rule.³¹ In the smaller vessels North American merchants and captains frequently held joint "risks", and West Indian merchants sometimes acquired interests of one-quarter or one-half. In similar fashion European traders stood as co-owners of ships going to their ports. The system was probably useful, not only in decreasing the risks of the individual owner but in producing among captains and oversea merchants more personal and vital interest in the success of the voyages undertaken. A similar pooling of interests is observable in the manner of placing insurance. Groups of merchants in the larger British or American ports³² underwrote the insurance demanded on vessels and cargoes, taking individual risks to an amount in most cases of £50 to £100.³³ Insurance was made for each voyage or section of a voyage and rates varied according to the distance covered, the dangers likely to be encountered, and the season of the year.³⁴ For voyages between any two of the three groups of ports represented by Great Britain, North America, and the West Indies two per cent. to three per cent. was usually paid.³⁵ Thus a vessel going from Rhode Island to Bristol via Jamaica was insured for the whole trip at four per cent. to six per cent.³⁶ A word may be added concerning the captains and crews. Of the skippers some were men of education and social

³¹ Pemberton Papers, XXI. 79; XXV. 110; Coates Papers, Elias Bland to John Reynell, London, May 31, 1746; Stevens, Porter, and Company to John Reynell, Madeira, April 10, 1748. William Redwood to Samuel Coates, Newport, July 6, 1773, *Com. of R. I.*, I. 233, 235, 511.

³² Of the merchants whose papers have been examined those of Philadelphia found underwriters in America while those of Rhode Island placed their insurance in England. New England merchants however sometimes turned to colonial underwriters. Coates Papers, Samuel Briard to John Reynell, Antigua, August 22, 1759. Sometimes a vessel was insured in England and in the colonies at the same time. Coates Papers, John Wendell to John Reynell, Portsmouth (N. H.), July 5, 1759.

³³ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 120, 148, 149, 185, *et al.* In England a policy cost 8 shillings and an agent who placed insurance often charged $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. commission for his trouble.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 166, 221, 253, 254, 296, 397; Clifford Papers, IV. 157; Coates Papers, John Moffat to John Reynell, Portsmouth, August 14, 1758.

³⁵ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 120, 148, 149, 185.

³⁶ In time of war rates were of course much higher when the policies covered seizures by war vessels or privateers. Thus in 1757, 1758, and 1759 rates for voyages between the continent and the West Indies were 11 per cent. to 22 per cent., between the continent and Great Britain 15 per cent. to 40 per cent., and between the West Indies and Great Britain 22 per cent. to 40 per cent. Coates Papers, general.

equipment, connected by ties of blood or friendship with the merchants and often entering their ranks after apprenticeship at sea.³⁷ The majority were hardy seamen, more at home with the wheel than with the pen, yet able to manage the business of the owners under conditions which often presented the greatest difficulties. The practice of allowing to them, in addition to wages and commissions,³⁸ the privilege of carrying certain amounts of goods on their own account³⁹ must have quickened their interest. Of their general honesty and ability there seems no question. Of the sailors, whose numbers may be estimated as one for eight tons in the smaller craft and one for twelve in the larger,⁴⁰ one hears less. They too would seem to have been well paid⁴¹ and well behaved. About one-third of their number were colored.⁴²

So far we have dealt with shipping operated from North America and from the West Indies⁴³ alone. But it must be remembered that British vessels also were employed in the carrying-trade between the islands and the continent. Of these, two classes are to be distinguished, the "stationed" ships and the "seekers".⁴⁴ The stationed ships were vessels assigned definitely to this branch of commerce. They visited successively American, West Indian, and British ports and had the advantage of securing in the last two

³⁷ A good example of this is found in the Clifford Papers, IV. 144, 145, 149, 157. In one instance we find a former midshipman of the royal navy seeking employment as a merchant captain, *Com. of R. I.*, I. 31. One frequently finds that members of a merchant's family acted as captains of his ships.

³⁸ In spite of the difficulties in dealing with colonial currencies one may gain the impression that the captains were at least fairly well paid. How general was the practice of allowing to them commissions on sales I have not been able to discover. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 61, 441; II. 45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ This calculation is made in the same manner and on virtually the same evidence as that concerning tonnage, *supra*.

⁴¹ Forty-five shillings per month as compared with 27 shillings paid on British ships. *Parl. Hist.*, XIX. 708; B. T. 5: 1, p. 166. Irving declared that many of them were Britons but this was denied by the West Indian merchants. B. T. 5: 1, pp. 24, 166. At St. Eustatius the rate was \$10 per month. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 354.

⁴² Papers printed by the order of the assembly of Jamaica for submission to Parliament, St. Iago, 1784.

⁴³ In a list of vessels arriving at Jamaica from North America between Christmas, 1766, and Christmas, 1767, only 3 per cent. are listed as West Indian vessels. P. R. O., C. O. 142: 19. Actual examples of the ownership of such vessels by West Indians are found in Pemberton Papers, XXIV. 44; XXV. 110.

⁴⁴ I have adopted the terminology employed by persons testifying before the Committee of Trade in 1784.

stages of their voyages at least freights of tempting bulk.⁴⁵ Yet they were under a serious handicap in competing with American vessels, and particularly with those of the smaller type. Owing to their large size and the inability of their owners to deal at so great a distance with producers, their operations in America were confined to large ports.⁴⁶ The freights which they here took on for the islands had been assembled at some expense and purchased by agents on commission.⁴⁷ By build they were unfitted for the carriage of lumber, yet the expenses of operating them were relatively high.⁴⁸ Most fatal of all was the fact that a full voyage could not regularly be completed within a year.⁴⁹ It is not surprising then to find that few ships were thus stationed for any length of time.⁵⁰ The "seekers" were vessels which ran between the islands and the continent in order to fill up time during which they would otherwise have been lying idle in West Indian harbors. Some had left British goods in southern Europe and crossed in ballast to the islands; others were British slavers. All were waiting to carry West Indian produce home. What profit they picked up in the intercolonial trade was merely added gain, for the three months' trip to the continent involved but little extra expense.⁵¹ It would seem, how-

⁴⁵ Generally speaking, the bulk of freights carried from Great Britain to North America or the West Indies was small as compared with that of the return loadings. According to Irving the proportion was as 1 to 10. Again the bulk of the southbound greatly exceeded the bulk of the northbound cargoes passing between North America and the West Indies. *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 120-122, 132; Coates Papers, Michael Atkins to John Reynell, Bristol, January 15, 1755.

⁴⁶ They apparently averaged about 200 tons in burthen, *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 14, 64; return of vessels entering Jamaica from North America between Christmas, 1766, and Christmas, 1767, *P. R. O.*, *C. O.* 142: 19; *Br. Mus.*, Add. MSS. 12404.

⁴⁷ The rate for purchasing in North America was 5 per cent. to 6 per cent. in 1755, Coates Papers, Michael Atkins to John Reynell, Bristol, January 15, 1755.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 53, 54.

⁴⁹ The crop of sugar and rum came on the West India market from January to June. *Com. of R. I.*, I, 20, 225, 443, *et al.* But a vessel would not in many cases receive a full lading before the late spring and for the trip to England anywhere from 6 to 11 weeks were necessary. *Ibid.*, pp. 383, 390, 392, 396, 403, 499. If she arrived in England in July she would not be ready to sail again before late August or September. *Ibid.*, pp. 403, 413; Coates Papers, Michael Atkins to John Reynell, Bristol, January 15, 1755. Yet it was necessary that she should reach North America, discharge her cargo, reload, and arrive at the islands by Christmas time or the beginning of January. *Com. of R. I.*, I, 433; *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 13, 14; Coates Papers, Michael Atkins to John Reynell, Bristol, January 15, 1755. That she should succeed in doing this year after year was practically impossible. Atkins to Reynell, *supra*; *B. T.* 5: 1, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Irving's statement to this effect, *B. T.* 5: 1, p. 121, is borne out by a letter of Elias Bland to John Reynell, August 17, 1756, in the Coates Papers.

⁵¹ Some in fact went merely in return for the promise of a lading for England, others in order to escape hurricanes. *B. T.* 5: 1, pp. 39, 40, 64.

ever, that their share of the carrying trade, like that of the stationed ships, was comparatively small.⁵²

So much for the general outlines of the trade. For the study of details it will be convenient to confine our attention to the simple and typical case of a small ship, owned and despatched by a North American merchant, carrying no supercargo, and engaging for the time in no other branch of commerce. The cargo of such a vessel, taken on at one or at several ports,⁵³ was usually the property of a number of persons. Besides the large share of the merchant principally concerned, various small lots of goods, representing the remittances and "ventures"⁵⁴ of North Americans or goods purchased on the orders of West Indians,⁵⁵ were taken as freight. On the deck were placed piles of lumber,⁵⁶ live stock,⁵⁷ and casks of salt provisions;⁵⁸ below were stored more perishable goods. But deck and hold were both well filled, for lumber, which on an average voyage filled two-thirds of all the space,⁵⁹ was used to fill all gaps.⁶⁰ The cargo safely stowed and bonds given for its delivery at destinations legally permissible,⁶¹ the sailing orders⁶² were opened. In the framing of these orders careful consideration had probably been given to the nature and amounts of shipments which had recently left

⁵² B. T. 5: 1, pp. 48, 53, 54. According to the report of the governor of Jamaica in 1774 very few British ships carried American produce to that island. C. O. 137: 69. The return of vessels arriving at Jamaica from North America between Christmas, 1766, and Christmas, 1767, shows that the tonnage of the British vessels amounted to only 17 per cent. of the whole. C. O. 142: 19. It will be remembered that the trade of Jamaica amounted to nearly half that of all the British islands combined.

⁵³ Excellent specimens of the old warehouses occupied by the West Indian merchants are still to be found on the Delaware waterfront at Philadelphia.

⁵⁴ A "venture" consisted of any consignment of goods sent as a matter of speculation to be sold for whatever they would bring. It might comprise no more than a single barrel of hams despatched by some thrifty housewife. Pemberton Papers, XXI. 79; Clifford Papers, IV. 114; Coates Papers. Joshua Howell to John Reynell, Barbados, August 3, 1748.

⁵⁵ Some West Indian merchants probably contracted for fixed annual supplies of North American goods. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 176.

⁵⁶ Evidence of Brook Watson before the Committee of Trade, March 20, 1784. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 257, 490. The practice was not however without its disadvantages. B. T. 5: 1, p. 54; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 450, 451.

⁵⁷ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 261.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁵⁹ According at least to Irving's estimate, B. T. 5: 1, p. 158.

⁶⁰ Clifford Papers, V. 121; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 257.

⁶¹ Specimens of the various kinds of bonds and certificates then in use are preserved in the collection of the Hist. Soc. of Pa., Custom House Papers, Philadelphia, I.

⁶² *E. g.*, *Com. of R. I.*, I. 60, 64, 96, 162.

North America for particular West India islands and to the direction of the prevailing winds.⁶³ On conclusions arrived at from these facts, and because agreements had been made for the delivery of goods at certain ports, the routes to be followed on both the outward and the home voyages were perhaps laid down. But more likely was the captain to discover that the owners expected him to search out the places where the highest prices were to be obtained in the disposal of his out-cargo and the lowest in the purchase of the return lading.⁶⁴ Supposing that he received orders so loosely framed, his route was largely predetermined by the direction of the winds. By searching first the Windward Islands, then the Leeward, and finally Jamaica he found through most of the year winds which favored him at every stage.⁶⁵ The voyage from the last continental to the first island port occupied, in ordinary weather, from three to four weeks.⁶⁶

Having arrived in the islands the captain had at once to set about disposing of his goods. Disposal of at least a part had probably been prearranged. Some parcels had been sent as remittances to creditors, others consigned to commission agents who undertook sale and collection at a rate of ten or twelve per cent.⁶⁷ Regarding the disposition of the remainder a choice of methods offered. The captain delivered them to commission agents,⁶⁸ personally sold them to merchants and planters in considerable lots,⁶⁹ or, as a last resort, retailed them from a shop rented for the purpose.⁷⁰ In any case his difficulties were great. West Indian merchants and planters alike enjoyed but small repute in business affairs,⁷¹ and, irrespective of

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 258.

⁶⁴ It is possible that the merchants of Philadelphia issued orders of this sort more frequently than those of Rhode Island. Such a conclusion might be drawn from such papers as have been examined. But in Rhode Island the practice was not unknown. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 15.

⁶⁵ The reason for this becomes apparent on the examination of any chart showing the direction of the prevailing winds. Particularly good instances of such voyages are found in the Clifford Papers, IV. 96, 114.

⁶⁶ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 35, 41, 82, 133, 134, 167, 192, 216, 255, 263, *et al.*

⁶⁷ Clifford Papers, V. 175, 178; Coates Papers, David Togo to John Reynell, Antigua, May 31, 1756. This was the rate in 1770. It appears to have been 15 per cent. some years earlier.

⁶⁸ This was the method followed in what probably constituted a great majority of cases.

⁶⁹ Pemberton Papers, XXIV. 21; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 255. In some cases at least the captain in making such sales was paid at about the usual commission rate. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁰ This method was probably adopted only in rare cases after the middle of the century and then with little success. Clifford Papers, IV. 144, 145.

⁷¹ The North Americans constantly accused them of being generally negligent, reckless in contracting debts and slow in offering payment. Sometimes we

the characters of the persons engaged, the keenest bargaining was required in every deal. Thanks to the smallness of the islands and their extreme dependence on outside supplies, any kind of American produce was apt to command very different prices in any two of them at the same time. For the same reasons prices fell and rose sharply with the arrival of fresh consignments or the non-appearance of those expected.⁷² Again, the price agreed upon in any particular bargain was arrived at with reference to the method of payment. On account of the scarcity of currency,⁷³ the difficulty in the collection of debts,⁷⁴ and the superior opportunities for purchase of West Indian produce offered by the foreign islands,⁷⁵ cash and bills of exchange⁷⁶ were in great demand. Hence North American goods were disposed of at a much lower rate where money was offered than where credit had to be given⁷⁷ or local produce accepted in ex-

find charges of deliberate dishonesty. Pemberton Papers, XXIV. 21, 44; XXVI. 147; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 174, 175, 269, 297, 373. A young merchant of Philadelphia, Ezekiel Edwards, thus describes them: "A person cannot be too cautious how he connects himself with a Barbados merchant, for many of them keep no books and if they can procure money enough to furnish their tables every day with barbacue, fish and sangree [*sic*] they are entirely regardless how their accounts run on . . . and most of them will bear running for years together without any marks of shame and perhaps promise ten times a day, if you can meet them so often, that they will pay in an hour." Pemberton Papers, XXIV. 44.

⁷² *E. g.*, *Com. of R. I.*, I. 211.

⁷³ The British West Indies had no currency of their own and received very little from the mother-country. They were forced to depend mainly upon the small amounts obtained through commerce with the foreign islands, and much of this foreign currency was drained off by the North American trade. Constant but ineffectual appeals were made to the home government. See, *e. g.*, the address of the assembly of Jamaica, December 18, 1778, C. O. 137: 73, and *An Inquiry concerning the Trade Commerce and Policy of the Island of Jamaica* (St. Iago, 1757). For denominations and values of the Spanish coins in use, see Clifford Papers, IV. 119; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 467.

⁷⁴ See note 71.

⁷⁵ Sugar and indigo as well as molasses and taffia could be obtained at a considerably lower rate. This was especially true of the French islands. Thus we find that one American captain was ordered to sell for cash at St. Eustatius the British West India produce received in exchange for his lumber and provisions, and to use the cash so obtained in the purchase of molasses, sugar, and indigo at Hispaniola. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 61. Sometimes remittance was made by West India merchants in the form of produce shipped on order of the latter from a foreign island. Pemberton Papers, XX. 128.

⁷⁶ Bills of exchange, which were usually drawn on British merchants, were as acceptable as cash but could seldom be obtained except for cash. *Com. of R. I.*, I. 262; Coates Papers, David Togo to John Reynell, Antigua, July 5, 1756. Numerous examples in the Coates Papers show that exchange on London was usually at 55 per cent. to 67½ per cent. This rate is in part accounted for by the fact that the pound sterling was worth 28 shillings in Jamaica currency.

⁷⁷ Clifford Papers, V. 175.

change.⁷⁸ In the last-mentioned case, *i. e.*, where barter took place,⁷⁹ the matter was still further complicated by the fact that the prices of the articles received in payment were scarcely less variable than those of the commodities offered for sale.⁸⁰ In any case the captain was confronted with innumerable difficulties and delays. Weeks or even months probably elapsed before the whole of the cargo was sold and terms of payment arranged.⁸¹ In the meantime something had probably been accomplished in the matter of securing the home freight.

In preparing for the return trip the captain probably received the assistance of local agents.⁸² Of assistance he could make good use, for now he met the difficulties of lading which he experienced on the continent combined with the difficulties of bargaining which he had just encountered in the islands. Some parcels of goods came as remittance to his owner on earlier debts,⁸³ some as payment for produce just sold,⁸⁴ some for sale by his owner on commission,⁸⁵ and others still (probably in answer to advertisement) as casual freights.⁸⁶ Finally, purchases were to be made with cash which he now had in hand. Such purchases probably necessitated visits to foreign islands,⁸⁷ but, no matter where the bargaining was done, in-

⁷⁸ Report of the Committee of Trade, B. T. 5: 1, p. 215; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 34, 224; Clifford Papers, IV. 33; V. 175.

⁷⁹ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 178, 224, 320.

⁸⁰ Sugar varied in value according to its fineness of grain and its color, rum according to its strength or "proof". A common test was that rum should "sink oil". Variations are to be found even in the case of molasses. Moreover special prices were commanded by the rum and sugar of certain islands, *e. g.*, Jamaica rum and St. Kitts sugar. The price of course also varied according to demand and supply. Thus American captains feared to push their purchases lest by so doing they might advance the prices. In general prices were low in the spring when the new produce came in and high in the autumn. Thus rum sold from January to July at 23 pence to 33 pence per gallon, and from August to December at 23 pence to 48 pence. Clifford Papers, IV. 114, 145, 230, 233; Coates Papers; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 45, 51, 81, 84, 168, 179, 198, 225, 229, 296, 312, 325, 371, 373; Hist. Soc. of Pa., Wharton Papers, Journal of Charles Wharton, pp. 490, 495.

⁸¹ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 36, 360, 366.

⁸² *E. g.*, *ibid.*, pp. 196, 225, 244.

⁸³ Pemberton Papers, XX. 128; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 6.

⁸⁴ Thus a commission agent sometimes undertook to remit by return voyage West Indian goods in part payment for the North American produce sent down. Pemberton Papers, XX. 128.

⁸⁵ The commission rate in Philadelphia was 10 per cent. Clifford Papers, V. 178.

⁸⁶ Pemberton Papers, XIX. 29; XXIV. 21. Some of these casual freights were also for sale on commission.

⁸⁷ Of these the French portion of Santo Domingo was the favorite. Here was produced more than one-half of all the molasses and taffia made in the

numerable variations of price, arising again from conditions of supply and demand, from differences in the qualities and values of the goods, and from methods of payment had to be taken into account. Since the first installments of the crops were often sold in advance⁸⁸ he had perhaps to consider himself fortunate that purchases could be made at all. And even when all negotiations were completed, serious difficulties were encountered in the actual assembling of the goods. The produce of the sugar plantations came gradually to market from February to June,⁸⁹ while bad weather sometimes prevented for weeks the operation of the primitive horse-driven mills in which the cane was ground.⁹⁰ So dilatory were the planters in carrying their produce to the shipping ports that purchasers had often to sail around the islands and invade the plantations in order to secure their goods.⁹¹ Thus the captain had again to encounter endless delays before he could announce to an impatient owner that the ship was ready to clear for home.⁹²

Viewed thus in detail, the trade seems almost a trivial thing. In reality it constituted a vital part of the greatest commercial system

French islands. Before 1767 trade with the British North Americans was carried on mainly through the port of Monte Christi, a Spanish boundary port notorious as existing almost solely for this purpose. During the Seven Years' War "flags of truce" were employed and at its close the removal of Acadians to Santo Domingo was used to screen much of this commerce. In 1767 the French government in order to secure to itself the regulation and profits of this trade opened St. Nicholas Mole to foreign vessels of 100 tons or more and allowed the importation there of wood, tar, live stock, and hides. The restriction as to tonnage was seemingly not enforced and the importation of fish was permitted shortly afterwards. According to an official report 465,000 gallons of molasses were sold at St. Nicholas for 23 sous (currency) per gal. from July to September, 1774. Archives du Ministère des Colonies, St. Domingue, first ser., nos. 128, 129, 130, 135; second ser., no. 24; C. O. 137: 59; C. O. 5: 38; *Gazette de France* for 1767, p. 611.

⁸⁸ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 231, 243.

⁸⁹ B. T. 5: 1, p. 19; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 20, 225, 265, 433. The harvest on the north side of Jamaica began in March, on the south side in February. In some parts of the island sugar was made throughout most of the year.

⁹⁰ *Com. of R. I.*, I. 36, 432.

⁹¹ Clifford Papers, IV. 157, 159; *Com. of R. I.*, I. 192, 196.

⁹² "Vessels from North America think nothing of lying four, five or six months". Clifford Papers, IV. 159. Harper to Clifford, Grenada, March 10, 1765. Perhaps American captains and merchants did not always find these delays especially onerous. We learn that Captain Zacha, Hutchins of Philadelphia gambled away "several hundred pounds in specie—also his brig valued at £750" at Barbados in 1770. Pemberton Papers, XXI. 79. On the other hand, Benjamin Birkett is able to announce that his friend and travelling companion Ezekiel Edwards is "the same in every instance as when he left Philadelphia, not corrupted by the vices of the island". Coates Papers, Benjamin Birkett to Samuel Coates, Barbados, October 10, 1772.

of the century.⁹³ To the West Indian its continuance was an essential condition of his prosperity, almost of his existence. Lumber and provisions produced in the islands or brought from Europe were high in price and irregular in supply. Reliance upon them must have made serious if not fatal inroads both on the planter's profits and on the productive power of the islands. Nor would the loss consequent on interruption of trade with North America have ended there, for molasses and rum could not even in greatly reduced quantities have maintained their prices if offered in the European market alone. As for the continental colonies, trade as they might with the foreign islands, the severance of relations with the British-owned group would have hindered their development to a marked degree. Farmers, fishermen, and lumbermen, from the Kennebec to the Savannah, would have sought in vain sufficient outlets for their goods. Merchants of New England and the middle colonies would have been hard pressed to find the means of liquidating their debts for British goods and the means of purchasing furs, fish, and slaves. By inference it may be seen how vitally important was the success of this intercolonial commerce for the interests of the mother-country herself. Since the economic decline of either group of colonies must have affected her industry, her commerce, her shipping, and her revenues, hers was a double interest in the trade. It is not fanciful to trace connection between the sawmills of the Kennebec and the sugar refineries of the Thames Valley or to state that the amounts of hardware and textiles which went either to Philadelphia or to Kingston were in no small degree determined by the quantities of flour and rum which passed between those two ports. Nor was it only love of liberty which in 1774 united Whigs of England, of America, and of Jamaica⁹⁴ in opposition to the Intolerable Acts.

HERBERT C. BELL.

⁹³ I have discussed the importance of the trade from the West Indian and from the British points of view in my paper on "British Commercial Policy in the West Indies, 1783-1793", published in the *English Historical Review* for July, 1916. Its importance from the American point of view is so well known that detailed discussion is unnecessary.

⁹⁴ The assembly of Jamaica, December 23, 1774, petitioned the king in behalf of the continental colonies. The petition after expressing alarm at "the approaching horrors of an unnatural contest between Great Britain and her colonies in which the most dreadful calamities to this island and the inevitable destruction of the small sugar colonies are involved", boldly asserts the principle that "no one part of Your Majesty's English subjects ever can or ever could legislate for another part". It protests against "a plan almost carried into execution for enslaving the colonies founded . . . on a claim of Parliament to bind the colonists in all cases whatsoever", against the illegal grant of colonial property to the crown, and against the encouragement of the "murder" of colonists. It implores the king to protect the colonists by mediating between them and his "European subjects". P. R. O., C. O. 137: 69.



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